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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

PUTTING THE WEATHER REPORTS TO WORK

A radio talk by Arthur J. De Mars, Meteorologist, Weather Bureau, delivered through WRC and 39 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, January 19, 1931.

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Hello folks:

I'm going to talk to you today about storm warnings and hurricane warnings. The forecasters keep a sharp lookout at all times for the appearance of storms. The storm appears on the weather map as an area of low pressure, with blowing counter clock-wise around the center of the depression. Not all low pressure areas are severe storms, hurricanes or tornadoes. When an area of very low air pressure appears on the map, it is charted and close contact is kept on the direction of its movement and it's severity. When the storm is likely to affect the coastal areas or the interior of the United States, the section likely to be affected is promptly notified of the existence of the storm, it's location and it's probable movement. These notifications are what is termed "Storm Warnings", or "Hurricane Warnings". Storm warnings are telegraphed from the forecast centers in whose territory the storm is likely to pass, while hurricane warnings are all telegraphed from Washington.

Storm warnings are displayed at more than 400 points along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts and on the shores of the Great Lakes. These points include every port and harbor of any considerable importance. So nearly perfect has the storm warning service become, that for years few storms of marked danger to maritime interests have occurred for which ample warnings have not been issued from 12 to 24 hours in advance.

The sailings of the immense number of vessels engaged in our ocean and lake traffic are largely determined by these warnings, and the warnings displayed for a single hurricane are known to have detained in port on our Atlantic coast, vessels valued with their cargoes at over thirty million dollars. I have seen as many as twenty lake cargo steamers on one day, all anchored in a snug little harbor on Lake Superior waiting there until the lowering of the storm warnings displayed by red and white lanterns and flags at a nearby Coast-guard station. These vessels were carrying cargoes of copper, coal, wheat, and freight valued at many millions of dollars. Interspersed between the large lake freighters were fishing boats that had come inside the breakwaters to seek shelter from the high winds and waves. Before coming into shelter these fishermen had gathered up their nets to prevent any damage occurring to them. Just in back of the lake freighters and fishing boats were private yachts anchored along side of a great boom of logs which were soon to become parts of your automobiles, houses, and furniture. No stretch of the imagination is required to realize how many millions of dollars of property and raw material are saved in one day by the display of storm warnings. On that same day you could have seen a picture similar to the one I have related here, in a number of other ports on the Great Lakes. Such precautions are taken by shipping interests all along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts and along the shores of

the Great Lakes. Agents of marine insurance companies refrain from insuring cargoes after a storm has been predicted. The distribution of storm warnings is very thorough and far reaching.

The mention of the word "Hurricane" is quite likely to create an uneasy feeling in the minds of people living on or near the Gulf and south Atlantic coasts, and on any of the islands of the West Indies and the Bahamas. After a hurricane has affected a certain area, the inhabitants of that area are quite "jumpy" for two or three years afterwards. Any intimation of the existence of a hurricane will bring a flood of inquiries to the Weather Bureau stations in the South Atlantic and Gulf coast area, and many inquiries to stations far distant from these areas. When the distribution of air pressure and the direction of the winds indicate that a hurricane is forming, special observations are obtained from the vicinity in which the indications show the formation of a tropical disturbance. Often the first indication of such a disturbance is given by an observation received from a ship at sea. Advisories of the location of the center of the disturbance and its movement for the following 12 to 36 hours are broadcast to ships at sea from several Naval and commercial radio stations. When the hurricane approaches the coast, storm warnings are displayed from towers and flagstaffs, yacht clubs and agencies of shipping interests are immediately notified of the location, severity, and probable direction of the storm. People leave all low lying districts to escape the destruction of tidal waves, and take precautions to protect their property from damage. These people are notified by newspaper bulletins, by telephone and telegraph, through social service agencies, and by almost every means of communication. The warnings are cabled to Cuba, Haiti, Bermuda, the Bahamas, and all the islands of the West Indies likely to be affected. The effectiveness of the warnings in clearing the shipping lanes is well shown by the few reports received from the vicinity of the center of the hurricane.

Well folks, you see that the Weather Bureau by its warnings of severe storms save many thousands of lives and millions of dollars worth of property each year.